The Message and Method of QUAKERISM.

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THE MESSAGE

AND

METHOD

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QUAKERISM

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1905.

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Through the kindness of a Friend, of the Large Body, the copies of the *American Friend* containing the article of John Wilhelm Rowntree on the "Position of Religious Thought in the Society of Friends;" Elbert Russell on "Quaker Literature," and the *British Friend* with the article of Edward Grubb on "Christ or Quakerism," all came into my hands for consideration at the same time. Some statements in these articles by way of concessions as to methods and declarations as to doctrines deserve more than a passing notice by thoughtful Friends in all branches of our Society.

Elbert Russell, with commendable frankness, points out the shortcoming or point of failure in what he calls the "Great Revival," and says the "historical continuity of our Society came dangerously near being broken." He gives as the main operating causes of this condition, that "For a generation we have been practically under the influence of literature and thought which is not of Quaker origin,"—and that the movement, "having no near Quaker models, adopted the *method of the Methodist* and Dwight L. Moody.

When we recall the great fact in our doctrinal history that the Quaker point of emphasis was the Inward Light, and that the point of emphasis, and the key to its entire distinctive denominational method, was the inspiration by the indwelling Presence of Christ, it is not at all strange that a move-

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ment that practically abandoned these points of emphasis for a generation should at last find *this* the place of its greatest weakness and failure. The Methodist method, with its point of emphasis on the "emotional experiences," was so distinctive that by it they obtained their name of Methodists. It is equally well known that the Quaker method, with its point of emphasis on the Indwelling Presence,—what George Fox many times calls the "dread power of God,"—and the trembling as in their wonderful faith they waited in silence for the inspiration of this Indwelling Presence, gave the name of Quaker to the Early Friends. The Methodist method has usually been successful in making Methodists. The Quaker method of inspiration, which Barclay often says was the necessary method for the Quaker message, made Quakers by thousands in the days of Early Friends. But now, after more than twenty-five years of trial of the Methodist method, it has come to be a most serious question: Will the Methodist method ever make real Quakers?—for up to this time it has conspicuously failed to do so.

Edward Grubb in the article in the *British Friend* touches this matter of the relation of the Quaker Message to non-Quaker methods with a master hand. He clearly expresses what was and is the true message and mission of Quakerism: "We are they to whom has been committed the work of building a religious Society upon Christ inwardly revealed; of trusting the PRESENT RULE of his Spirit for our whole Church polity." The message by which this work was to be done he says "was neither more nor less than Christ inwardly revealed to each seeking soul,—a revelation opened to the spiritual eye by the direct touch

of the Father himself;" and that "essential Quakerism was to George Fox and his Friends nothing else than Christ revealed in the heart—not as an idea, but as an experience." Of the conditions prevalent in the Society of Friends, and the unsatisfactory results noted by Elbert Russell, Edward Grubb says: "The time has surely come to set ourselves in earnest to learn the lessons of past failure, and seek how we may truly deliver the message committed to us." He says: "The Evangelical Spirit rejecting the essential Quakerism omitted to speak to its converts of universal and saving Light, and taught of Christ as the way to the Father in a manner that went far to obliterate Him as the Light that lighteth every man, and virtually restored the outward work of Christ to the place it held in the Puritan theology." This idea of the reversal of Quaker thought to non-Quaker positions is also strongly stated by Elbert Russell as the result of the "influence of non-Quaker theology," in which class he names the literature of the Sunday School movement, the Christian Endeavor, the Anti-Saloon League, the Women's Christian Temperance Union, and the missionary and holiness movements, which he says "for twenty years" has so operated "as to almost leave us without conscious excuse for existing as a separate body." When Russell makes the observation as to the doctrinal result of this remarkable abandonment of the Quaker position, that "few stranger somersaults have ever been turned in denominational history than that by which a form of Calvinism has come to dominate among Friends," in this Russell is in substantial agreement with Edward Grubb when he says the movement had restored the Puritan theology. By its fail-

ure in teaching the Quaker message Edward Grubb says: "The Evangelistic Spirit lost its power to appeal to the seekers whom in large numbers George Fox drew to Christ. They drew in many who would have made excellent Methodists or Salvationists, but who never had it in them to appreciate the inward and spiritual foundation on which true Quakerism rests." In this situation the Quaker method of Inspiration, with its revelation and prophecy, "the trusting of the present rule (or opening) of the Spirit for the whole Church polity," was abandoned and an effort was made to support these converts with organized service, as Russell says, after the method of the Methodist pastorate. In adopting these changes in method Edward Grubb says "the Society of Friends has been in danger of mistaking its calling; of doing work that is better done by others while omitting its own; of gaining adherents, many of whom can never be Friends."

This failure to grasp the true mission and message of Quakerism is stated by John Wilhelm Rountree with even greater force than by either Elbert Russell or Edward Grubb. He says that "for fifty years the Society of Friends has been an unintelligent spectator of the greatest revolution in religious thought since the time of the Reformation;" that we fell back from the advanced positions of the Early Friends and finally accepted a compromise with mid-Victorian evangelicism; that we have been so led that, like Kuropatkin on the Shaho, we have no plan of campaign—we only dig trenches and stand still; that at this time we are threatened by a grave menace because of the extraordinary absence of constructive Quaker thought. And he adds: "If our young people continue on the one hand to draw their spiritual nourishment and take

their intellectual guidance almost wholly from sources outside the Quaker fellowship, and at the same time find their main interest and activity in an undenominational Adult School movement, which tends increasingly to become interdenominational, there can be no question of the result. The Society of Friends as a separate organization will speedily disappear."

Because of the ability and place held by these three Friends, and because they voice a wide-spread consciousness in the Society of Friends that the results of modern methods are in many ways unsatisfactory, the writer felt it rest on his mind as a duty to bring the testimonies of these three men together.

The message of Quakerism was a message of Jesus Christ, as an inward saving Light in all men, and the method of Quakerism was a method of personal inspiration, through the revelation and prophecy of which the work of faith became a walk in the Light. And all this conscious failure may be traced to the fact that for almost a generation the Society of Friends has very largely got away from its own message and method.

Russell recognizes that loss has come from not keeping in touch with Quaker history and literature, and he affirms a need for a revival in this direction. He goes further; he affirms that "there are many indications that a revival of the study of our history and principles is already in progress." With a clear view of what ought to be he says: "We need men who have the courage of their convictions, trained thinkers, to state our doctrines in the terms of modern thinking as clearly as Barclay stated it for his day in the terms of Descarte's Philosophy." But it seems as if for thinking Friends who feel this need, this work of restatement has already been done in large

outline by the articles of Edward Grubb and John Wilhelm Rowntree.

Edward Grubb says: "We cannot deliver the Quaker message unless we understand it; unless we believe it; unless we trust it." He says: "Failure came to the Evangelistic spirit because it omitted to speak to its converts of the universal and saving Light;" that "essential Quakerism is a message of the inward work of Christ—a message of Christ inwardly revealed to each seeking soul—revealed not by creed, not by tradition; not by flesh and blood, but opened to the spiritual eye by the direct touch of the Father Himself. This personal inspiration is not an idea but an experience, in which each for himself receives the Light that shines in himself from the face of Jesus Christ."

This method of Christ inwardly revealed is the inspired basis which the Quaker message has always taught as the inward source of all rule, guidance, government and leadership of the Spirit, and the necessary ground and spring of all ministry or public service in the spiritual worship of God.

John Wilhelm Rowntree says the Inward Light as a point in our basis of belief has never been properly understood. As such a basis it has never been properly established that we have never properly outlined the spiritual truth of the indwelling God. In line with the thought expressed by Russell, that Quakerism needs restatement in terms of modern thinking, Rowntree says: "If the Society of Friends is to have a continued existence at all it must produce a modern interpretation of its original conception, and lead the world of thought to deeper understanding of Jesus Christ."

Rowntree says: "The Society of Friends stopped thinking in the seventeenth century;"

that the thought stuff of Fox, Penington and Barclay was never properly worked out; that for fifty years the Society of Friends, instead of leading, as in the seventeenth century, has been an unintelligent spectator of the greatest revolution in religious thought. Yet, notwithstanding these serious conditions, Rowntree says, with great hopefulness: "Once more we are back in the main stream of life, and, like Fox and Barclay, are aware of the surging current of modern thought"—that while the present may be a time of peculiar peril, it is of peculiar hopefulness for the Society of Friends.

Now, when men like Auguste Sabatier and other leaders of modern thought have led men to abandon the doctrine of an Infallible Church, and driven them out of their last defense, the doctrine of an Infallible Book, if Friends do not miss the note of a new gospel, we have the great opportunity of our history before us at this moment—for with George Fox's message of the indwelling God, and the inspiration, revelation and prophecy of his method, with its "self-evident" witness of the Spirit, we face the final issue of faith. To those who understand it and hold fast this old Quaker message with its method, the hour of their supreme victory, which Fox almost foresaw, is at hand.

The result of this new situation Rowntree states is, "that we are thrown back on the Inward Voice as the ultimate arbiter even of the Bible." Rowntree is right—for as Friends stand on the old doctrine of the "Spirit as the primary rule of faith," every move of modern thought by which men are driven on to this Quaker ground is a move for the supreme victory of the Quaker message.

Finally, in the wide range of his constructive Quaker thought, Rowntree suggests the need-

ed interpretation of the doctrine of the Inward Light. He says the Inward Light on which the tongue trips so lightly needs clear teaching and guidance; that it requires searching elucidation, because that in it we are face to face with psychic phenomena but dimly understood; that in it we stand upon the edge of spiritual deeps of mystery and understanding which the fool cannot compass." Then, as if he foresaw the wonderful results of this profound analysis, when the psychic phenomena of the Inward Light shall be unfolded and its deeps of spiritual mystery revealed by the spiritual psychology of its method of inspiration, Rowntree voices the hunger of the human spirit for this inward assurance in the words: "I want to know what God is." "I want to see within the limits of human consciousness a meeting point between the soul of man and the unseen Spirit." As if to complete his constructive message to the Society of Friends, and leave the solution of the whole mystery of the Inward Light in definite outline for others to work out, he crowns this remarkable series of observations on the Inward Light by the most far-reaching thought of it all. In harmony with the highest lines of modern constructive thought, that receives Jesus as the Son of God Incarnate, and interprets his Divine Person as the source of every redeeming agency in the plan of Redemption, and in whose Person as the only Living Institution of the Gospel every material symbol is spiritually fulfilled and ended, Rowntree now advances the thought that the Personal Presence of this Jesus as the Gospel witnessed in conscience is the place of meeting between the Soul of Man and the Unseen Spirit, and that as such a meeting place and revelation in men Jesus Christ becomes the balance wheel of the doctrine of the Inward Light.

As the writer read these observations of John Wilhelm Rowntree, and studied them with a deep sense of their bearing on the future of the Society of Friends, he remembers no time in his life when his soul has been so stirred and wrought upon. And this feeling was intensified by the thought that in the Providence of God a young man with vision so clear as to so forecast the future form of the Quaker Message as one inspired should so soon have both voice and pen stilled in death.

One more observation: and that is, that as the great change and revolution has come in the higher religious thought during the last fifty years, as witnessed by many such works on the Divine Immanence as the Philosophy of Theism, the Self-Revelation of God, Religions of Authority, the Great Enigma, the philosophy of the Christian Religion, the Doctrine of Sin, with others on Anthropology, Comparative Religions and almost the entire Intuitional Philosophy; the narrow view of the prevailing Methodist method has had no part in this great discussion.

And now, while this Divine Immanence doctrine, which finds its only true exposition in the Quaker Message of the Inward Light, is pressing up through these channels of Revelation — History, Science and Philosophy— for recognition as the spiritual side of the Gospel of Christ; before Friends ever take their place successfully in the future of this discussion, they must believe and trust their own message and restore their own method of inspiration, which is the only method in harmony with the Quaker Message of the Inward Light.

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